

Poem

Physical

JOHN DONOGHUE, *Cleveland Heights, Ohio*

It's *nothing*, he says, a small asymmetry, we'll check it out
when you get back. The worst, is that it's cancer;
the best, is that it's just you.
Is he *crazy*? When I get *back*?—the million dollar rented beach house
turned to stomach acid?! *Do—it—now!* I shout,

shaking him, let's check it out *yesterday!*, this town bursting
with urologists just sitting on their hands—where they rest them
when they're idle. (Friends, have physicals in Fall,
with nothing planned.)

A small asymmetry. A bad sign for one who's been symmetric
all his life—write with the right, throw with the left,
when praised, quick to name a fault.
That's *balance*, he says, not symmetry, and on his pad
he draws a circle. Prostate—the size of a walnut,

pale, firm, partly muscle partly gland, a fist
at the base of the urethra, and *yours*, he says, is slightly
asymmetric—on his circle he draws a bulge
from 12 to 3. You're *fine!* It's *nothing!* *Relax!*

And what *would* I have him do? Cry out, *Oh, no!*
when he felt me? And he's right, it *is* balance we're after,
not symmetry, not that static, sentimental same-old same-old
across a boundary—one side unable to give
or teach anything to the other—our deep dislike of symmetry
the reason we marry opposites, not clones, the reason one foot

is always larger than the other, one heart, one lopsided stomach,
the reason first there's A, then B, the reason one-fourth of my walnut—
from 12 to 3—struck out on its own and bulged
into asymmetry. So . . . o.k. . . I'll go. It *is* nothing.

I'll put on my Ray-Ban Cats, rub on my #20 Bain de Soleil.
I'll put on my aqua Speedo trunks and my black Rockport thongs.
I'll put on my Spiegel rugby shirt, and my Yankees baseball hat.
I'll carry my red aluminum beach chair and reed mat
under my left arm, and my all-cotton towel and rainbow umbrella

under my right. I'll carry my cooler bag and my book bag
over opposite shoulders, and carefully, it being just myself,
I'll walk my newly strange asymmetric body—feeling now
like a threat—down to the sea.